



Opening Question:

Have you ever had an extraordinary experience you still think about today?

Have you ever had one of those rare moments of deep peace? Or a brief insight into a reality greater than yourself? Those unusual events can be life changing. They are moments we can call prayer for they allow us to touch God.

Prayer: Divine Invitation

What is prayer? It's simply God's invitation. He makes himself present to us and calls us to respond. His presence is a gift. It's a call to experience what is beyond ourselves even in creation. Our response to his invitation is more than saying "Yes" once and a while. It's an ongoing commitment of the heart with God. It's what we call a covenant.

The Bible gives us examples of such covenant commitments. With Abraham, God offered land and descendants. Abraham responded with fidelity to the Lord. Through Moses, God revealed his loving kindness to his people. Moses responded to God with intimacy. With David, God promised the nation's king a descendant who would rule forever. David modeled submission and repentance even in the face of personal sin. Through Elijah and the prophets, God spoke to his people who had gone astray. Elijah and those after him remained faithful even in the face of public rebuke and persecution. Ultimately, we find the height of covenant commitment in the Bible's book of prayer, the Psalms. Psalm 103 is a taste of divine praise.

*With all my heart I praise the Lord,
and with all that I am
I praise his holy name!
With all my heart I praise the Lord!
I will never forget
how kind he has been.*

Psalms 103:1-2



But more than a gift and a commitment, prayer is union with God. Jesus embodies that unity and makes it real for us. Jesus modeled prayer as a priority whether in his temptation in the desert, his moments alone with his Father on the mountain top, or his submission to his Father's will at the Garden of Gethsemane. He taught us how to pray when we turn back to God from our selfish ways, when we place our trust in God, even when we dare to call God "Our Father" in the Lord's Prayer. Moreover, as one our mediator, he hears our prayers and places them before the Father.

Forms of Prayer

Our response to God's invitation can take on various forms depending upon our circumstances. We bless God not only for the fact we are alive but for his very presence in our lives. We bless him for his blessings on us. As his creatures, we adore the Father as our creator. Yet, as his creatures, we have needs. So, we petition God not only for the items of life and peace in our worlds, we ask him to forgive us, to help us grow and realize the Kingdom even moment by moment. But, we do not just pray for ourselves. We intercede for others to turn to God, to come into his presence, and to be made whole. Because God is with us and has showered us with his love, we offer him thanks. In our gratitude, we return to his place in our lives. And we praise him.

*I will praise you, my God and King,
and always honor your name.
I will praise you each day
and always honor your name.
You are wonderful, Lord,
and you deserve all praise,
because you are much greater
than anyone can understand.*

Psalm 145:1-2

Expressions of Prayer

While there are different forms of prayer, there are different depths of prayer. The most familiar expression of prayer is vocal. We pray to God with our words and songs. This is the most communal way to bless, adore, ask, thank or praise God. But there are more intimate ways to encounter God. We can meditate on God with more than just our voices. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church stated:

Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion, and desire...Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in lectio divina or the rosary. This form of prayerful reflection is of great value, but Christian prayer should go further: to the knowledge of the love of the Lord Jesus, to union with him.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 2708

The final goal of prayer is simply enjoying the presence of God. It's being with him. We call this contemplation. This is the most difficult expression of prayer because it requires discipline. It requires daily commitment to a regular time and place, to silence of the mind, and to focus purely on God. This is simple in concept but is difficult to achieve in practice.

Persevere in Prayer

Sometimes, we find it hard to pray. But these are the times we need to pray. Our busy schedules, peer pressure, and mistaken notions from popular culture about prayer keep us from praying. We can get distracted, feel God is absent from us, or even get lazy in our practices. We might even doubt our

faith because we believe God has not answered our prayers. At these moments, facing these pressures, we must redouble our efforts. God does answer our prayers but in the way he wants not in the way we expect. So, we should first seek God's will in our prayers especially for the Spirit. Jesus told his followers:

I tell you to ask and you will receive, search and you will find, knock and the door will be opened for you. You know how to give good gifts to your children. But your heavenly Father is even more ready to give the Holy Spirit to anyone who asks.

Luke 11:9, 13

With the Spirit, we can always find it possible to pray. In fact, prayer is necessary for both our faith and our lives as Christians.

Prayer is far more than asking God for our wants and needs. It's an invitation God makes to us. It's a call to respond with words of blessing, adoration and praise. It's an exploration of the mind and heart to find the divine presence. It's the difficult practice of silent contemplation. But, no matter how hard we struggle to pray, we can take comfort in the work of the Spirit.

The Spirit helps us when we are weak. We might not know what we should pray for or even how to pray. But the Spirit appeals to the Father for us even in groans that words cannot express. The Holy One who searches hearts knows what's in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit appeals to God on behalf of the saints.

Romans 8:26-27

Closing Prayer

What is your favorite prayer? What is your favorite form of prayer?

Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs CCC 2559-2622, 2623-2649, 2697-2745.

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